

Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and Homeland Security:

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name is Catherine Daly Draheim. I am here representing not only my daughter, Katie Youmans, my granddaughter, MacKenzie Youmans, my husband, Bill, and myself, but also, my son-in-law, Sgt. Josh Youmans. Josh died on March 1, 2006 at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas from injuries he received while serving our country in Iraq. Josh was wounded on November 21, 2005 and spent several months fighting for his life. Katie, MacKenzie, Bill, and Josh's mom spent all those months in Texas visiting with Josh, encouraging Josh, and simply being there for Josh as he fought to survive. They brought him for burial in his adopted home town, Flushing. On March 11, the day of his funeral, we were greeted by protestors, six, I believe, and a virtual sea of red, white, and blue which included members of the Patriot Guard, several VFW and American Legion Posts, and representatives from several churches, as well as, citizens from the Flushing community.

However, we were very much aware of the protestors' presence. This put a bit of a cloud over what was suppose to be -- a celebration of Josh's life. The overwhelming support of those who participated in the sea of red, white, and blue allowed us to focus on Josh.

I am sorry to say that this is not always the case. In fact, when my daughter was making the final arrangements for Josh's funeral, she was asked if she wanted the Patriot Guard present. Katie agreed that it would be a good idea in light of what we had heard had happened at a soldier's funeral earlier that same week.

This should not have to be a question asked of anyone, military or otherwise, who is planning the funeral of a loved one. This should not be a concern of any family mourning the loss of a loved one.

I have read both HR 5887 and HR 5888 bills. I urge this committee to pass both of them. In this day and age, I am ashamed to say that we need these bills to protect families in mourning and to maintain the dignity of the individual they mourn.

I have read and heard that some feel that these bills go against the First Amendment of the United States Constitution by not allowing freedom of speech. These bills do no such thing. As I understand them, especially HR 5887, and individual, group of people, and/or organization are free to protest as long as the individual and/or organization doing the protesting do so while respecting the rights not only of the deceased individual, but also, the family who is mourning their loss.

This is not a denial of anyone's freedom of speech. HR 5887 places parameters on how that freedom may be exercised. The Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution places Freedom of Speech in the First Amendment for a reason. It was not placed in the Third, Fourth, or even the Tenth Amendment. Our founding fathers were very clear about the importance that they placed on this freedom. With Freedom comes responsibility. That responsibility has not been shown when demonstrators lack the respect for the individual, and, in our case, an individual who gave his life so that they can continue to enjoy that freedom. They must respect the rights and dignity of others.

Again, I urge you to pass HR5887 and HR 5888. Not one more soldier...Not one more individual...not one more family should have to be concerned about protestors as they prepare to mourn and bury their loved one.

March 28, 2006

To Whom It May Concern,

I am sorry that I am unable to attend these hearings about this legislation that I feel so strongly in favor of. I am currently at Fort Sam Houston, Texas visiting the families of the other injured soldiers involved in my husband, Sgt. Joshua V. Youmans', humvee incident. I have asked my mother, Catherine D. Draheim, to read this letter on my behalf in the hopes that it will give all of you an understanding of this bill from a family's perspective that was directly involved with protestors at their loved one's funeral.

My husband, Sgt. Joshua V. Youmans, passed away on Wednesday, March 1, 2006 from the injuries he sustained from an improvised electronic device. Josh was not only a exemplary soldier but a devoted husband and father as well. I am so proud of all that he accomplished in his very short time with us. His funeral was meant to be a time of celebration of his life and remembrance. It was not meant to be a time for demonstration and protest.

There is a place and a time for everything. There is a time to mourn, a time to celebrate a life, and a time to protest. A funeral should not be a time of protest but rather a time to mourn and celebrate a life for those who wish to do so. My husband died fighting for the first amendment rights for the people of a nation he loved dearly and he was proud to serve and do his duty. He fought for our freedom of speech but that freedom of speech should not be the issue while honoring one's service to his or her nation. Protestors should not be allowed to be near the mourning family and friends of fallen soldiers during such a trying time in their lives.

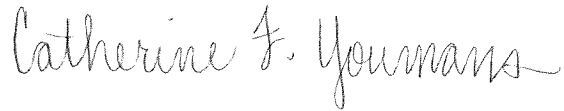
I am very thankful to the community of Flushing for shielding my family and friends from these protestors. The outpouring of support was incredible. The community came out to show their patriotism, honor and respect for a hometown hero. They were also there to put our minds at ease and let us, as Josh's family and friends, focus our time and effort on saying goodbye to an incredible human being.

As I look back on what has happened over the past few weeks since my husband passed away and begin to put my thoughts together on how best to explain all of this to our infant daughter, MacKenzie, I am torn. I want our daughter to be able to look at all of the newspaper clippings and television reports and be proud of her father. There are many media reports that tell of her father being a hero but there are also a lot of reports that cover the protestors and the controversy created by these few people. I will one day have to sit down with her and explain what occurred and why. It is hard enough that MacKenzie will only learn of her father through pictures, memories of others, and media reports but to tell her there was also a shroud of negativity around this difficult time of our lives is not fair to her. I would like all memories of her father to be positive.

Passing this bill will not change what happened outside of my husband's funeral on March 11th but if it can save another family from any additional heartache during their loved one's funeral and save another child from having any negativity surrounding their parent's memory, then it should be passed. A funeral of a soldier should be a time of honor, respect and dignity for all involved. We, as Americans, have a duty to ensure that

every fallen soldier is treated this way. If it were not for these fallen heroes, we would have no voice. I am eternally grateful for the sacrifices that each one of the fallen have made to ensure that we can voice our opinions freely in this great nation but a soldier's funeral is not one of those times. Instead, I would hope that many more communities would learn a lesson from Flushing and come out with their American flags and salute a person who put their life on the line for our nation and paid the ultimate sacrifice, like my husband, Sgt. Joshua V. Youmans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine F. Youmans". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid, with a large, stylized 'C' at the beginning.

Catherine F. Youmans
Proud National Guard Wife